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ABSTRACT

Speech communication teachers at both secondary and postsecondary school levels must cooperate to improve oral communication education. Despite the importance of oral communication skills, speech courses are rarely required in high school. Teachers must tell school boards, higher education boards, and faculties of the importance of speaking and listening skills and the need for minimum standards in oral communication. In addition to providing leadership in promoting oral communication standards, college and university teachers can help persuade state certification agencies to set adequate requirements for oral communication teachers and can work at strengthening their teacher preparation programs. Students need more observation and practice experience before student teaching and more performance oriented speech classes as part of certification requirements. Teachers of methods courses should have significant secondary school teaching experience and secondary school students taking summer debate workshops should be taught solid argumentation and debate theory. Finally, members of higher education faculties should try to reach a wider audience by publishing articles in general rather than professional periodicals. (MM)

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COMMUNICATION, COORDINATION, COOPERATION

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As report after report is published about what is wrong with America's education, we hear calls for more science and math, stiffer standards and more basics. However, we have become convinced, along with the Carnegie Commission, there also is a crying need for more and better training in oral communication, regardless of the career. Without good oral communication skills, people are less effective in any situation. Teachers of oral communication, both higher education and secondary, need to cooperate to improve the situation that exists with oral communication education.

Probably all of us are aware of the status of oral communication programs in secondary schools. As we have known for years and Book and Pappas point out in their "Study of the Status of Speech Communication in Secondary Schools," oral communication is not one of the skills required for high school graduation and college entrance. Few elementary schools have any training, and many high schools offer speech courses as a frill, and it is often the first program dropped when budgets are cut. Too often English teachers insert a short "speech unit" into an English course and then insist they "teach speech." In many cases, other teachers in a school do not see the necessity for any type of speech class. Not too many years ago in the district in which we teach, when teachers were checking off the competencies of students about to graduate, one would hear, "Have you ever heard Johnny talk?" "Yes," would be the reply of someone in the staff lounge. "Then we can check off the Speech Competency." That is, we think, too often a prevalent attitude.

"If a person can talk, he/she can speak." Yet few people think that if a person can mark on paper with a pencil, he/she can write.

The problem is many of the teachers who think it is unimportant to have a speech class cannot speak well themselves. They are often apprehensive speakers and serve as poor role models for the students who watch and listen. As we know, schools spend the most time teaching writing and reading, yet in practice we speak and listen much more.

Oral communication is one of the most important skills anyone can have. Unfortunately, when it comes to cross level (college-secondary) communication, few of us do a very good job. With few exceptions most secondary folks feel those in higher education have little feeling for, or understanding of, what goes on at the secondary level. We don't want to place blame for this lack of communication on either those in higher education or those at the secondary level. What we propose are some steps to solve the problems that now exist.

At the high school level, it seems to us oral communication should be a separate graduation requirement. Local school boards, high school staffs, state boards of education and state superintendents need to realize the importance of learning speaking and listening skills. Secondary teachers and higher education professors need to cooperate in an effort to tell school boards, higher education boards, and faculties of the importance of speaking/listening skills and the need for minimum standards in oral communication, so adequate curriculum can be offered to all students. Those decision-making groups need to understand the importance of acquiring the skills of speaking/listening for students to be successful.

We need the leadership those in higher education can provide in accomplishing the acceptance of oral communication as an important element in the education of all students. We also need college and

university faculties to help persuade state certification agencies to set adequate certification requirements for teachers of oral communication.

We don't know about all of the western states requirements for certification, but in the state of Oregon, twenty-four hours is all that is required for speech certification. Language arts certification requires forty-five hours; home economics certification requires forty-eight hours, and one must have forty-five hours to be certificated in industrial arts. The comparisons are astounding! A person to be certificated in speech in Oregon is required to take four classes--Discussion Techniques, Oral Interpretation, Argumentative Speech, and Forensics. Not only are few hours required to gain certification, but now speech must also be a combined endorsement. One no longer is certificated in speech only. What this means in practical terms is that very few speech majors are teaching speech and even fewer will be in the future. If one must have forty-five hours or forty-eight hours in another area and then twenty-four additional hours in speech to receive speech certification, it seems only reasonable that the person will major in the area of larger concentration.

Certification is not the only problem, college and university speech/communication departments can also help by strengthening their teacher preparation programs. Prospective teachers can do much more preparation for their student teaching experience that will make it more positive for them. Students should begin observations during their sophomore year. During the junior year, they should attend classes at the secondary school and teach one of those classes in close cooperation with the teacher of that class. Finally, when they student teach, they will have had several obser-

vation experiences, will have some feel for teaching, and will have a much better background in the field. As secondary school teachers who have worked often with student teachers, we would like to see them receive a better background. Too often student teachers come into the class room with little or no performance background. They can do little to provide role models for the students; besides, they find it difficult to aid the student who needs help in performance. The student who has had performance training as well as philosophy, analysis, and group interaction will gain in poise, use of language, and the study of audience adaptation. It will only help him/her to be a better teacher.

Classes required of prospective teachers should be useful and should include more performance activities. We recommend, as a minimum, the following classes: Argumentation, Persuasion, Discussion, Freedom of Speech, Ethics, Forensics, Classical Oratory, British Oratory, American Oratory, Rhetorical Theory, Communication Theory, Broadcasting, and Oral Interpretation.

The method classes also need evaluation. Teachers of method classes should have significant experience in teaching at the secondary level. High School teachers of speech from both thriving and struggling programs should be invited to address the classes.

In addition to upgrading methods classes we believe summer debate workshops need some changes too. Although we are sure these workshops are beneficial for the college debate programs, they can be detrimental to good debate on the high school level. Students need to be taught solid argumentation and debate theory. They also need to be taught how to be persuasive and how to speak at a normal rate of speed in every day words. Allowing students

to speak at what seems a thousand words a minute must be unlearned when they return home. Speed does not make one a good debater and speaker. Please teach students real world terms; "one AR, two NC, and pull this across" just aren't necessary. Many debaters go on to become lawyers. Can you imagine an attorney speaking rapidly and using legal jargon to persuade a jury whose average education level is only eighth grade? We do know some schools have excellent workshops with qualified staffs. Please don't allow some over zealous college debaters to misguide impressionable young high school students.

In conclusion, higher education personnel can provide needed leadership to accomplish the acceptance of oral communication as an important element in the education of all students. Members of higher education faculties can work to persuade school boards at all levels that oral study should be required for college entrance. The people at the college and university level can do much to persuade certification agencies to set certification requirements for teachers of oral communication to reflect their training in speech and to bring it up to the level of other subject areas.

Members of the higher education faculties can publish articles about speech/listening in general publications that are read by a cross section of the population. Most articles about the importance of oral communication are found now only in speech journals. We are not the ones who need to read those articles. Principals and staff members of the high schools will accept more readily articles they read in general publications because they don't appear to be so "self serving." People who don't read the "professional" publications need to read about the needs for oral communication.

We hear much about the inadequacy of education now, about the basics, and about making school more academic. We hear about creating more scientists and mathematicians. Certainly there is always room for educacion reform. We believe we can start with a reform of major importance and as people who teach oral communication we can work to make the decision makers in our world of education realize that oral communication is a necessary skill for success and that it is indeed a basic, not a frill.

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